Women Work & Care

Policy at the Crossroads

An examination of issues that affect women's life choices and opportunities.

Forum Report October 26-27, 2005

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Conseil consultatif sur la condition féminine de la Nouvelle-Écosse

2008-03183/

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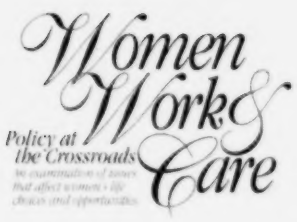

1st Edition
Maureen O'Connell, editor
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Published by Communications Nova Scotia
Printed in Nova Scotia

This publication is also available on the Internet at the following address:
www.gov.ns.ca/staw/womenworkandcare2006.htm

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Women, work & care:
policy at the crossroads:
October 26-27, 2005:
forum report

Includes bibliographical references and index.
Available also on the Internet.

ISBN 1-55457-007-7

1.Family – Nova Scotia – Congresses.
2. Women – Nova Scotia – Congresses.
3. Family policy – Nova Scotia – Congresses.
I. Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

HQ559.15 N6W65 2006 306.8509716 C2006-901879-0

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Acknowledgements

The generous support of sponsors, the thoughtful contributions of speakers and panelists, exemplary teamwork of committee members, staff and students, and the enthusiasm of participants: all these were key to the success of this forum. Our ongoing efforts to improve the lives of women and their families are the true expression of our gratitude to all our partners and participants.

Sponsors

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Public Service Alliance of Canada – Atlantic Region
Saint Mary's University (Department of Political Science, Women's Studies and the Women's Centre)
The United Way of Halifax Region

Keynote Speaker

Jane Jenson teaches political science at the University of Montreal. She is a director of the Institutes for European Studies of the University of Montreal and McGill University and the 2005 recipient of the Pierre Elliot Trudeau fellowship. Her interests in policy analysis include gender studies, diversity, family policy, early childhood services and care for the elderly.

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Executive Summary

Women, Work and Care: Policy at the Crossroads was a forum dedicated to examining how current family policy affects women and their families in Nova Scotia. The focal points of many women's lives are work and care but the policy response to supporting them in these areas is either lagging behind their present circumstances or is absent altogether. The misalignment between lived experience and policy means that many women and their families miss out on a better quality of life.

Members of the Roundtable on Women's Economic Security hosted by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women are concerned that family policy is veering off track, putting Nova Scotia at a policy crossroads in the areas of maternity/paternity benefits; early childhood education and care; dependent care and family-friendly workplaces. It was important to test the pulse of Nova Scotians on these issues.

Participants representing all sectors from all areas of the province expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the forum. There was appreciation not only for its relevance but also for the recognition or confirmation of why policy affects how they are living their lives, what choices they have to make due to the current policy mix and how the application of policy affects their future well-being. The process of knowledge transfer was heightened by the ability of the forum's panelists to place women's experience not only along the life span but also in a policy context.

It is hoped that Women, Work and Care is the beginning of a process that will help to build a policy community in the area of family policy. This process will include those people most affected by the issues, particularly diverse, young women whose futures are shaped by the policies that influence their life choices.

Future action identified by participants included the following:

- providing education on the issues women are faced with in everyday life
- offering participants future opportunities to meet, share and learn together
- forming policy group(s) or networks including diverse women, business owners and policy makers which would follow up on the work of the forum
- sharing the outcomes of the forum with those who can influence policy change including Members of the Legislature and Members of Parliament
- taking ownership of the issues and mobilizing women to take action
- monitoring government's action and policy development on issues such as maternity benefits, childcare, dependent care and family-friendly workplaces.

Message from the Chair of the Advisory Council

Sonja Power, Chair of the Advisory Council welcomed forum participants

"We have invited you – young women, federal and provincial government officials, unions, and community organizations – to help us build a policy community. Today, we focus on four policy tracks: early childhood learning and care; maternity and parental leaves; family-friendly workplace policy; and dependent care.

These issues have touched most of us. If you're a woman you will probably provide care for someone in some way, and it will affect your other choices: how you spend your time, or money, or how much you earn, or how fulfilling your work is. You have many reasons for becoming involved in developing policy and we hope this network we are building today will be a learning opportunity for future action.

Through the Roundtable on Women's Economic Security, we will continue to work on these issues and to bring them forward to governments. We want to guide that evolution until it fully supports resilient Nova Scotian families within the context of our mission: to advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women.

This policy forum is an important step in growing a policy community on these issues, and we will work to continue its growth and development."

Why Are We at a Crossroads?

Many women in Nova Scotia are experiencing the increased pressures caused by changes in demography, family structure, employment and the life-course itself. In order for women to achieve economic security, policies should be aligned with trends in these areas. However, the current policy response is leaving many families and particularly women in families, without adequate support, with excessive workloads and time pressures, and with high risks of financial hardship now and in their senior years.

> *"Care and income responsibilities are out of alignment with policy thinking and practices. There is a growing disjuncture between existing social policies and evolving families and labour markets."*
>
> Jane Jenson

Women, Work and Care: Policy at the Crossroads emerged from the concern of the Roundtable on Women's Economic Security (see Appendix A) that Nova Scotia lacks a coherent and well-planned system of early childhood education and care. A primary question centered on how the quality, access and cost of early childhood education and care affects the capacity of women to reconcile family responsibilities with work demands. Subsequent discussion also raised the issue that assistance and care for family members goes beyond childcare, affecting many women throughout their lives. Forum planners recognized that the policy areas of maternity/parental leave; early childhood education and care; care and assistance to family members with disabilities or in old age; and family-friendly workplaces are crucial to women's economic security. These four areas are our "policy tracks".

The crossroads image is a deliberate one as policy should address the needs of women regarding work and care throughout the life span. These "tracks of our lives" are not necessarily independent and for many, intersect with one another. Life circumstances in one area will affect choice or direction taken in another. Maternity or parental leave may seem to be transitory events, but interruptions in employment affect career progression, future employment earnings, and eventually pension benefits.

The complexity of women's lives today makes policy development challenging but vital. Policy affecting women's lives is at a crossroads, leaving many with the prospect of unfulfilled futures due to policy gaps that expose them to increasing social and economic insecurity. Coherent policy development taking into account the current reality and responsibilities of women's paid and unpaid work would immeasurably enhance the lives of women and their families in Nova Scotia.

A "Virtuous Policy Mix" for Women and their Families

Jane Jenson's keynote address laid the groundwork for the forum dialogue. In the address, she presented the welfare diamond, a conception of social architecture needed to shape a coherent policy mix for women, children and families. We will refer to it as the well-being diamond.

For most people, a major requirement for well-being is market income earned themselves, or by a member of the family. However, we also derive our well-being from non-market benefits and services provided within the family such as parental childcare, care and assistance of elderly relatives, and housework. Well-being is also achieved from governments, via publicly provided programs and services for which we pay through the tax system and user fees. Finally, the community provides for well-being through the provision of a wide range of services and supports such as childcare, recreation and leisure, food banks, seniors' centers, and so on. (*Jenson* 2003, 2)

Jenson's conception of the well-being diamond animates the interplay of the family, market, community and government so that family policy is viewed as a mix of the responsibilities of these four sectors.

A public policy can reduce the responsibility of the family by giving it more support. Market responsibility can be reduced by providing more services either for free or below their real costs. A public policy can support or weaken a community in its activity. (*Jenson*, 2005)

She points out that a current imbalance in the four responsibility sectors of the well-being diamond has created new social and economic risks for families because the policy assumptions that served old models are no longer valid.

Several major differences in the ways Canadians live their lives have given rise to new social risks. These differences are: an aging society, new family structure and work-family nexus, shifts in immigration, and intensification of challenges in Aboriginal communities. Some of the sociological and economic patterns that have generated these different lives are that birth rates have fallen by over half, divorces have increased by a factor of six, the incidence of lone-parent families has almost tripled, the proportion of women in the labour force has tripled, the share of population over 65 has increased by 60%, the share of Aboriginal people in the population has tripled, and the share of immigrants to Canada coming from Europe or the United States has fallen from 94% to 22%. These remarkable changes in the patterns of Canadians' lives over half a century have altered many of our basic assumptions about the roles and responsibilities within the welfare diamond. (*Jenson*, 2004, 14)

Existing policies have not yet responded to these changes, resulting in gaps and shortfalls that have different and more severe consequences for women than for men. (*Jenson*, 2005)

Changes in Family Structure

The "traditional" employment pattern of male bread winner with a stay-at-home wife and mother is now a reality for only 16% of Nova Scotian couple families, down from 43% in 1976. (*Statistics Canada*, 2003) The rise in the number of lone-parent families is primarily due to decreased marital stability. In Canada, lone-parent families have gone up from 10% in the 1960's to one in four families at the present time. (Jenson, 2005) In 2001, lone parents led 27% of families with children in Nova Scotia, up from 17% in 1981. Of these lone parents, 83% are women. In 2002, 40% of female lone-parent families in Nova Scotia were poor compared to 3.6% of couples with children. (*Statistics Canada*, 2002)

The shift in family structure has created what Jenson calls a "struggle for care : the high total workloads women face because of the combination of paid work

and unpaid childcare, housework and, increasingly, eldercare. This finding was well documented by MacDonald, Phipps and Lethbridge (2005a) in their work under the auspices of the Healthy Balance Research Program, where they examined women's combined paid and unpaid work in relation to stress, and found that eldercare responsibilities particularly added to stress for women in two-parent families. Women in lone-parent families are especially stressed by high workloads and by poverty, as demonstrated by Colman, who made reference to "time poverty" as an issue. (*Colman, 1998, 35*)

Demographic Change

Demographic trends affect women uniquely. Falling fertility rates and our aging population combine to create increased demands for caregivers, with fewer future caregivers to assume caregiving roles. It takes a 2.1% birthrate to replace our current population. Canada is well below the replacement rate at 1.5%. The percentage of the population over 65 has doubled since 1941 and the percentage of 65 year olds living alone has increased from 12.4% in 1961 to 26.9% in 2001. (*Jenson, 2005*)

Nova Scotia does have segments of its population that are growing. The province's population of African descent increased by 8.6% between 1996 and 2001. During the same time period, Nova Scotia's total population declined by 0.1% in Canada. The African Nova Scotian population accounted for 4% of Halifax's population in 2001 and for 52% of its visible minority population. Nova Scotia's Aboriginal population is also on the increase. By 2001 approximately 50% of Aboriginal people in Nova Scotia were under the age of 25 as compared with almost 31% of the general population. (*Rushe, 2005, 7-8*)

Changes in the Life-course

The life-course has become less standard, less linear, as has the transition to becoming an adult. In past generations, people ended school, married, started a family and bought property in a relatively short period of time. This is no longer the case. Over 40% of young adults in their 20's are living at home, up from 20% in 1970. (*Myles, 2005*) In part this is due to extended time obtaining an education with many incurring high debt loads. As well, when education is complete, many young people still find it difficult to establish steady employment in a job leading to a career.

At the other end of the lifecycle, the trend to early retirement has leveled off, with more older workers remaining in the workforce. (*Stone, 2006*) Inevitably, the delayed workforce entry of the current generation of young people will require significant changes in pension and retirement policy to meet not only their own needs, but also those of the growing population of the "very old".

Changes in Employment and Occupational Structures

Women's participation in the paid work force has continued to steadily increase in recent decades, not leveling off until the mid-90's, while men's participation has actually shown a slight decline. Between 1976 and 2003, the proportion of Nova Scotian women who were employed increased from 36% to 53% while the proportion of men who were employed declined from 66% to 62%. The increase in employment of women with young children is particularly dramatic. Currently, two-thirds of women with children under age 3 are employed, compared to 1976, when only one quarter of women with children under age 3 was employed. (*Statistics Canada, 2003a*)

"You would think that these changes in women's working circumstances have led to better economic circumstances but what we find is that changes in work and family are generating risk."

Jane Jenson

Significant numbers of women work part-time. Increasingly, many are "own-account self-employed"; i.e., they have their own business, but no employees. The life-time career, with one employer over a long period of time, is a phenomenon of the past for both women and men, leading to less job security for all workers. This in turn affects family formation and has major implications for retirement policy as well.

Policy Considerations for New Social Risks

The new social risks faced by individuals and families give rise to a wide range of policy issues and implications. Those most central to this report are as follows:

- The delayed entry of young adults into the paid labour force, significant student debt load, and difficulty in securing stable employment raises challenges for every facet of the well-being diamond: for government, for community, for business and industry, and for families.
- Present policies are limiting the ability of many families to have the number of children they would actually like to have. (*Bibby, 2004*)
- Women and men need help with debt reduction and financial planning at an early stage in their lives so they can realize their family aspirations and avoid financial hardship in their senior years.
- With the majority of mothers of pre-schoolers and school-age children in the paid work force, there is an urgent need for an affordable and accessible early childhood education and care system.
- Many new mothers who work do not qualify for any maternity and parental benefits because eligibility is currently tied to Employment Insurance. This affects women who work part-time, seasonally, and in self-employment (with the exception of self-employed fishers) (*Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 2005, 5*)
- Given the higher birthrate for both the Aboriginal population and those of African descent, as well as increasing recruitment of immigrants to the province, culturally appropriate services for children and their families are vital. This is also the case for our Acadian population.
- Single-parent families need better supports to achieve their educational potential, to provide care for their children, and to participate effectively in the paid work force.
- Family-friendly workplace policies are essential, not only to meet the needs of children, but also to allow for assistance to elders and to younger adults with disabilities.
- Low birthrates mean that future seniors will have fewer adult children to support and care for them.
- The labour force participation patterns of women are significantly affected by family responsibilities. Interrupted labour force participation limits the ability to accumulate pensionable earnings, resulting in higher rates of poverty in the senior years, particularly for separated and divorced women. Care for dependent or vulnerable family members resulting in work interruption has serious consequences, not only on present income but also on future pension benefits. (*Barnwell, 2006*)

Forum Background and Goals

The Women, Work and Care: Policy at the Crossroads forum was developed by the Advisory Council's Roundtable on Women's Economic Security. Membership of the Roundtable consists of federal and provincial civil servants as well as members of women's organizations. The Roundtable enables the development of shared knowledge and understanding about the social and economic circumstances that affect women's economic autonomy and security, and the policy measures currently in place.

The issues already detailed in the first section of this report were of concern to the Roundtable, which set early childhood education and care as a priority consideration.

The decision was made to involve as many young women as possible in the forum, and to address women's work of caring throughout their lifecycle, thus adding care and assistance to children and adults to the agenda. Forum planners also noted the necessity of including women in all their diversity and from rural as well as urban areas of the province.

Specific objectives of this forum were to:

- Review four policy areas in the context of social and economic change for women and their families including:
  - Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
  - Maternity/Parental Benefits
  - Dependent Care – care and assistance to family members with disabilities or special needs
  - Family-friendly Workplaces
- Provide a platform for young, diverse women to tell their stories of how policy affects their life choices and opportunities
- Share ideas on how to bring about positive policy development for women and their families in Nova Scotia.

Forum Overview

Women, Work and Care: Moving Forward on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on October 26, 2005, set the stage for the conference through a variety of presentations to inform participants about current activities on ECEC, including the government's plan to move forward with ECEC in Nova Scotia and the childcare advocacy perspective. Panel members also elaborated on the QUAD principles: early childhood education and care should strive for high quality, and it should be universally inclusive, accessible and developmentally appropriate. These principles serve as the foundation for the development of ECEC in the province.

On the evening of October 26, Jane Jenson introduced participants to a conceptual framework and overview of the key issues and policy challenges she believes need to be met in order to diminish new social risks for women and their families. Her thoughts are reflected in the first section of this report.

The Women, Work and Care: Policy at the Crossroads forum on October 27 included:

- An opening panel to present women's stories and experiences
- Dialogue and visual representation on the Herstory Wall, to gain insights into how future policy directions can be shaped
- Lessons learned through the research, strategic planning and advocacy work of Women's Network of Prince Edward Island for policy change in relation to maternity and parental leave
- A panel presentation on current initiatives to promote positive policy changes
- Café conversations to elicit participants' ideas on early childhood education and care, dependent care, and family-friendly workplaces.

Forum Proceedings

The Tracks of our Lives

The forum opened with a panel of women who shared their personal stories of family responsibilities, earning and learning, and care arrangements. Their presentations were followed by commentary from Jane Jenson. The precarious nature of women's work and care arrangements was well illustrated by the panelists and resonated with participants. There was a prevailing sense that at any given moment dynamics could shift within the well-being diamond to disrupt a delicate balance in any one of their lives.

Panelists were of culturally diverse backgrounds and illustrated a range of family structures, from the husband-wife traditional family and single parent families, to those composing "shifting mixes" (elders, foster children, extended family, and friends). This results in enhanced demands on women's caregiving responsibilities. These structural changes alone require a wide range of policy responses. Dr. Jenson flagged changing social norms, in that two out of the four panelists were single mothers. She noted that 40 years ago they would not have been selected to be panelists unless considered to be "worthy widows".

For one young panelist, a single mother of two living on income assistance, the struggle to find safe, affordable housing took five months. She waited a year for a childcare space. This young mother was prevented from planning further education or employment until she obtained childcare and housing.

For another panelist, the decision to care for her son with a disability had consequences for the paid work she could do over the next 20 years. Because of her health care training, she could do "just in time" work as this allowed her to combine family caregiving with paid work. However, as a "casual" worker, she received no benefits, which affects her future economic security. Additionally, although she was in constant contact with the health care system due to the disabilities of her son, she was not informed that services such as respite were available, nor did she know what information she should be looking for to assist not only her son, but herself and the other members of the family.

"There were many resources that we did not know existed, and the more I eventually found out about, the more angry I became because providing care could have been made so much easier."

Linda Carvery, panelist

"We need to know and get the information. There are blockages. Blockages caused by the expectation that families should be doing it by themselves."

Jane Jenson

Program design and integration that emanate from different policy areas in the well-being diamond are absolutely critical. This was demonstrated by one of our panelists who is a single mother enrolled in a learning program with a fairly rigid attendance policy. If her child is sick, he cannot attend daycare, but she cannot miss school either. If she misses too much school, she will be out of the program.

Panelists raised the impact of racism, the lack of policy to support full integration and participation,

and insufficient resources to implement or enforce anti-racist policy. One of our panelists spoke about the importance of family-friendly workplaces and cultural sensitivity particularly with respect to the importance of extended bereavement leave in Mi'kmaw communities.

"The women celebrate diversity but in their everyday lived experience it doesn't happen. There are consequences when there is no policy to support full integration."

Jane Jenson

A single mother of three young children involved in two businesses spoke of her painful experience with racism as an immigrant. After living many years of her life in Canada she was hit on the head with a beer bottle while walking down a street in Halifax and told to "go back from where you came from".

She suggested we can learn from other cultures by changing behaviour and structures so that the old and young have more opportunity for interaction with each other in our communities.

"Immigration support needs to be more than the first staged weeks after arrival."

Flavia Lytle, panelist

One of the messages heard time and again during the forum was that policy makers need to recognize the importance of flexibility to support women's choices and opportunities. Policy needs to be implemented in such a manner as to respond to the lived experiences of women and their families in order to be effective.

Families are at least partially shaped by the policies that affect them. In turn, the policies are shaped by what our politicians, policy makers, and (increasingly) judges think families are or should be. If their thinking is not informed by what is actually happening within families, their policies will not meet our collective needs. *(Eichler, 1997, 4)*

If policy does not respond to the changing nature of family life, it is not possible for women to make further gains in achieving full social and economic equality, nor is it possible to maintain the resilient and vibrant family life at the heart of our culture.

"We need a publicity campaign – One Size Does Not Fit All – so people see the importance of flexibility in social policy."

Linda Carvery, panelist

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

During the conversation café, participants were asked what concrete things needed to happen in Nova Scotia to ensure early childhood education and care would reflect the QUAD principles.

"What I really struggled with was the high cost of daycare while I was going to university. The high price of childcare has limited a lot of my life decisions, such as where I could afford to live, where I should go to school, whether or not I could afford to go to school, and even whether or not I could afford to work. I was a single mother during my undergraduate degree, and I went right back to class a week after my son was born. It was really difficult to even find childcare."

Lindsay, participant

Key themes raised in the discussions included the desire for a publicly funded, not-for-profit system in Nova Scotia. Participants expressed interest in a Hub Model. A Hub Model brings together ECEC programs with parent education and support programs. They are community-board operated (non-profit) and primarily neighbourhood-based.

Early learning and childcare programs will be at their core, along with family learning / support programs. Community-board membership will include at least 33% parents of young children. A municipal planning process will be established to ensure equitable distribution of the HUB centers throughout the municipality. The architecture established within the framework of a national ECEC system funded by Ottawa, creates an infrastructure for an ECEC (early childhood learning and care) system that fulfills the principles outlined above.

(YWCA Hamilton, 2005)

Benefits of having an integrated model include high quality, flexible, affordable ECEC programs and supports for parents and children; enhanced accountability to the public and to government for expenditure of funds through its non-profit status; and enhancement of community stability and cohesion. *(YWCA, 2005)*

The critical connection of adequate compensation for early childhood educators to the delivery of a quality system was also emphasized. Early childhood educators and assistants ranked in the 10 lowest-paying occupations working full-time in Nova Scotia in 2000. Ninety-eight percent of workers in this occupation are women. *(McFadyen, 2004, 38)*

Participants suggested the following actions be taken by government regarding ECEC:

- Develop a universal, adequately and publicly funded ECEC system based on QUAD principles to replace the current system of primarily parent-funded daycare with subsidies available only to very low-wage earners
- Acknowledge childcare policy as the cornerstone for progressive family policy
- Create and adopt high standards for professional qualifications of early childhood educators
- Increase pay and benefits for early childhood educators.

For every dollar invested in high quality childcare, there is a $2 benefit to children, parents and society.

(Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 2)

Participants suggested the following actions for ECEC:

- Investigate models such as the Hub Model – a collaboration between parents, community and childcare service providers in the development of programs that reflect a wide variety of diverse needs (e.g., infant care; flexible hours of care; rural and urban)
- Offer programs and services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Accommodate children with special needs in childcare facilities
- Mobilize childcare sector workers to organize collective bargaining
- Enhance working environments and wages for childcare workers
- Enhance recruitment and retention strategies for childcare workers
- Support training and development opportunities for childcare workers
- Enhance the connection between ECEC and economic development at the community level

- Explore other sources of funding for not-for-profit centres (e.g., Community Economic Development Innovation Fund).

All sectors of the well-being diamond can work to:

- Raise awareness of the critical urgency of early childhood education and care for our society now and in the future
- Elect more women to political office to ensure women's voices are heard on ECEC.

Children with Special Needs

Parents of children with special needs cited economic challenges, in terms of the loss of current income and future financial security when their caregiving responsibilities affects their workforce participation. Compounding the loss of income is the high cost for therapies, which if not provided, can seriously affect later quality of life. Many caregivers of children with special needs must spend most of their energy in meeting basic needs, with little time, resources and energy left for advocacy.

Caregivers for children with special needs also require special training and supports, which are not always available. Better coherence is required between education and health care services. Children with special needs require continuity and commitment for the services they receive throughout their lifespan.

Suggested action for government and/or community sectors include:

- Provide parents with information about the disability affecting their child and identify essential services that are available as early as possible
- Provide financial support for families that have children with special needs (physical and intellectual)
- Provide access to specialist care in rural areas
- Provide better supports in the school system.

Dependent Care – Care and Assistance for Adults

Forum participants were asked to identify their interests, needs, and concerns about caregiving responsibilities for aging relatives and for persons with physical and/or intellectual disabilities and mental health issues.

The aging of our population is creating increased attention to the situation of family caregivers. In partnership with the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health and the Women's Health Research Unit of the University of Ottawa, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women has been involved in research on paid work and unpaid caregiving of women in Nova Scotia. Results to date identify many of the issues caregivers face, with a variety of published reports available on the Healthy Balance Research Program website available at www.healthyb.dal.ca.

Eldercare

In 2002 almost 20% of Canadians over the age of 45 were providing care to one or more family members or friends over the age of 65.

(Fast, 3)

Caregivers provide a wide range of supports to seniors including housekeeping, transportation, meal preparation, yard and maintenance repairs, care management (making appointments, arranging for services, etc.), financial management, personal care, and emotional support. While policy makers and practitioners see family/friend care as offering better quality at a lower cost than publicly funded programs, the economic and non-economic costs to the caregiver are typically ignored. (*Fast, 2005*)

Beyond transportation-related concerns, a number of other expenses were identified by participants as having an impact on their caregving. These costs included alternative care provision, care recipient expenses (e.g., ambulance costs, special diets, clothing, housing, and extras like eating at McDonald's). Participants felt that when providing care, their costs seemed to quickly escalate and the basic daily living expenses were further compounded by additional costs if the care recipient required special care. (*Gabagan and others, 2004, 24*)

Non-economic costs reported by participants included high stress, depression and burnout, social isolation, and the lack of opportunity to enjoy the freedom of an empty nest.

The challenges of caring are exacerbated by difficulties in finding and getting adequate supports and services (i.e., physicians, access to technical aids, respite care, homecare). In addition, some services offered are not flexible enough to ease the load of caregiving. For example, respite services are not always available for last-minute emergencies. As one caregiver stated, this does not allow flexibility to attend events, or meetings that are not planned well in advance. Changes in home care staff prove frustrating to caregivers and receivers alike. In rural areas there are even fewer formal supports than in urban areas.

Caregivers also experience additional financial hardships. Few caregivers live with the person they take care of and when they are at a distance there are extra transportation costs as well as additional care hours. For those caregivers who interrupt their jobs to care for a family member, there is a negative impact on both current income and on Canada Pension Plan (CPP) credits. For women caregivers, paid work results in high stress particularly when the elder lives in the same home as the woman.

Suggested action by government and/or community sectors to improve the well-being of those dealing with dependent care issues include:

- Undertake research into a continuum of care model for a national caregiver strategy to meet the needs of Canadians (*Lund, n.d., 35*)
- Enhance the sharing of information on programs and benefits available for seniors
- Review income testing points for access to services
- Provide access to economic and social supports for caregivers caring for seniors
- Enhance the quantity and quality of homecare services
- Enhance protection of seniors at risk of abuse
- Provide advocacy for caregivers
- Supply supports for aging populations in rural communities.

All sectors should:

- Engage in a campaign to inform the public about services and programs available to caregivers.

Persons with Physical and/or Intellectual Disabilities

Participants commented on the lack of specialized medical services in rural areas, which necessitates travel to Halifax. For caregivers, this means taking a full day off work and usually an overnight stay at their own

expense. Transportation in these instances also poses major problems. For example, one caregiver indicated that while the Acadian Lines accommodates wheelchairs, it arrives in Yarmouth at midnight, and there is no accessible transportation from downtown to a person's home at that time. (As of the writing of this report Acadian Lines no longer provides service to Yarmouth and the present carrier is not wheelchair accessible.)

Caregivers must accommodate their caregiving responsibilities through more flexible work arrangements that allow them to work partially from home. These situations, however, are often contractual jobs, with no health, maternity, or pension benefits. Increased expenses associated with homecare medical equipment and maintenance, accessibility, and transportation needs pose additional financial burdens. Sometimes even accessing rental equipment can be a challenge.

The additional physical work that a caregiver must do when providing care to a family member with limited mobility, particularly when working all day at a job, creates greater risk of emotional and physical illness for them. For seniors looking after a spouse with a disablity this often necessitates a move to institutional care.

All sectors could work together to:

- Improve flexibility of homecare services
- Increase the availability of equipment (loan or rental) for persons with mobility impairments, including aids for lifting the care recipient
- Increase the availability of respite care for caregivers
- Ensure awareness that respite is available
- Enhance transportation for persons with mobility problems in rural areas
- Accommodate the work arrangements of caregivers
- Ensure existing tax and Employment Insurance provisions do not adversely affect the future income of caregivers

Persons Requiring Mental Health Services

Participants commented on the downloading of public services to individual families, the stressors associated with trying to find appropriate services, or in some cases, assistance with encouraging a family member to accept service. The demands of working full-time also conflict with the Herculean task of advocating for services, especially when both caregivers and care receivers are unfamiliar with available services, programs and entitlements.

Lack of community supports, particularly housing, once persons with mental health issues are discharged from hospitals is a huge problem. This means these responsibilities either fall to family members or result in increased homelessness, legal issues and readmission to the inpatient setting. Concerns with respect to lack of psychiatric care in rural areas were also cited.

Government can work to:

- Enhance resources such as housing and other community supports for persons with mental health issues
- Enhance knowledge and awareness of homelessness and mental illness
- Improve infrastructure in rural areas
- Support better in-school services for children with disabilities.

Community supports and legal services can:

- Increase first voice participation of persons with mental health issues from policy to program development
- Increase support for accessing/navigating the system
- Advocate for persons with mental health issues and their families.

All sectors in the well-being diamond can:

- Provide awareness and education on mental health issues.

Family-Friendly Workplaces

A supportive work environment is key to the economic security and well-being of women who combine paid work with caregiving.

Forum participants were asked to share their perceptions of what a family-friendly workplace would mean to them, and what measures would be required to achieve this.

Participants indicated the need for a workplace culture that recognizes and accommodates demands of balancing work and family commitments for different family needs and structures, including lone parent and blended families. A family-friendly environment would not penalize women for family commitments or view maternity leave as "problematic". A family-friendly workplace would also encourage flexible work arrangements.

Participants also cited the additional burdens posed for the "sandwich generation", caring for both children and elders. While today's sandwich generation is relatively small, it will grow substantially as baby boomers age and younger generations have children later in life. (*Statistics Canada*, 2005)

Participants also commented on the need to address long work hours and workloads that limit time for family commitments and increase risks to mental and physical health. In addition to effects on individual health, conflicts in work/life balance also have significant corporate health costs, including higher absenteeism and attrition rates, low morale, a greater number of work-related compensation claims and productivity losses. (*Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*, 2005)

There is also an impact on communities when women are overextended with family and work commitments. This is one of the main reasons that women cite for not participating fully in government decision – making as elected officials and citizens. (*Haggart and vom Scheidt*, 14) Furthermore, a general downturn in community volunteer activity results from the heavy paid and unpaid workloads women are carrying. Job security after extended leaves was raised as an issue. The return to work for some women is not always a positive experience. For some, there is no guarantee of returning to their previous position and further career progression is unlikely. Employees look to employers for assistance in reconciling their work and family responsibilities.

> *"The Public Service Commission (NS) is working on a comprehensive workplace strategy. It includes elements such as a healthy physical environment, individual health, and workplace culture. We are starting a healthy workplace advisory committee and will consult on the healthy workplace strategy."*
>
> *Joan Parks-Hubley,*
> *Nova Scotia Public Service Commission, panelist*

Suggested action with respect to government and labour market sectors of the well-being diamond to promote family-friendly workplaces include:

- Provide flexible work arrangements (e.g., work from home, flexible work week, accommodation for flexible start and end times, leaves with or without pay)
- Improve benefits (e.g., choices in benefits, provision of benefits and pension for contract

work; ability to respond to unexpected family emergencies)
- Make accommodations to physical environment (e.g., breast-feeding friendly; daycare on site)
- Require managers and supervisors to use existing work-family harmonization policies in a manner supportive of the employee
- Provide employee assistance programs that have a solid understanding of family issues
- Examine ways in which policy can support small businesses to comply with leave provisions that they experience as more onerous than larger companies
- Enable self-employed women to access benefits
- Encourage men to use parental leave at greater frequencies than they now do.

Maternity/Parental Benefits: Mobilization for Change by Women's Network PEI

"Having maternity leave extended to a year allows for new mothers to spend more time with their babies. With my first child, I was only allowed three months, which makes it difficult to breast feed. There is also pressure for women when they are back to work to make choices between caring for sick children and going to work. During a baby's first year, there are many things, such as teething, fevers and drooling that make it difficult to bring them to daycare."

Donna Frizzell,
Daycare Director, Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre

Eligibility for maternity and parental benefits (i.e., partial income replacement) is tied to the provisions of the Employment Insurance Act, which is in the federal jurisdiction, and to any collective agreements or employer policies that may benefit the parent.

To become eligible for maternity benefits under EI, a woman needs to work 600 insurable hours in the previous 52 weeks or since the applicant's last claim, even in regions where fewer then 600 hours are required to qualify for regular benefits. Additionally, self-employed women are not eligible to contribute to EI and therefore cannot claim maternity benefits. As a result, 40% of new mothers are excluded from maternity benefits especially those who do temporary, contract or seasonal work and women who work part-time. (*Statistics Canada 2003b, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2003, 2004*)

The women who are least likely to be eligible for benefits under the Employment Insurance Act include younger mothers who have not been in paid work; women with low education levels; women with low incomes; single mothers; immigrant women; visible minority women; Aboriginal women and women with disabilities. Research indicates that women in Atlantic Canada are less likely than women in other parts of Canada to be eligible for benefits under the Act. (*Lund, 2004, iii*)

In her presentation on October 26, Dr. Jenson underscored that once we understand the ingredients needed for a good policy mix it is not enough to imagine the change needed. We have to mobilize around the issues, stimulate public debate and support, and influence policy makers at both elected and appointed levels.

Women's Network PEI provided an excellent example of mobilization to advocate policy change, sharing the strategies they are using to advocate for improvement to maternity and parental benefits. The goal of their project, funded by Status of Women Canada, was to examine the current legislation on maternity and parental benefits and develop recommendations to make the benefits more equitable for all women. Their research identified gaps in both economic and social policy leading to increased numbers of women being excluded from benefits that would improve women's working lives and economic status.

Ten recommendations were developed in four key areas:

1. Eligibility
2. Length and Value of Benefits
3. Employment Protection
4. Issues for Further Consideration

"The EI surplus is currently at $46 billion so we can afford the recommendations. There are no federal government monies in the EI fund. They are contributions made by employers and employees."

Paulette Sadoway, Canadian Labour Congress participant

The Women's Network did not stop at formulating recommendations, however. A highlight of their project was a trip to Ottawa where they presented the recommendations to some 70 contacts including Members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, senators, senior officials and policy think tanks. They also made a presentation to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which released its own Interim Report on the Maternity and Parental Benefits Under Employment Insurance: The Exclusion of Self-Employed Workers in November 2005, echoing many of the concerns expressed by the PEI advocates. Their presentation to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Forum of Status of Women Ministers in September of 2005 was also favorably received.

The activities of Women's Network PEI provided an insightful example of community advocacy for better policy to support women's economic security. For further information you can visit their website at http://www.wnpei.org

Future Action

Participants in the forum recommended the following future action:

- providing education on the issues women are faced with in everyday life
- offering participants future opportunities to meet, share and learn together
- forming policy groups or networks including women who are most affected by this policy, and policy makers which would follow-up on the work of the forum
- sharing the outcomes of the forum with those who can influence policy change, including Members of the Legislature and Members of Parliament
- taking ownership of the issues and mobilizing women to take action
- monitoring government's action and policy development on issues such as maternity benefits, childcare, dependent care and family-friendly workplaces.

"There is opportunity to look at new ways of involving Canadians in the policy process. First voices of people who experience the impact of policies must be at the table. There will be tensions as we strive to do things differently but this is a good thing.

A vision is needed regarding the quality of life that we want to create and strong social policy to support that vision. Social indicators need to be developed to match economic indicators and help people understand the linkages. We know that productivity is higher where there are supports for women in the community."

Kathy Moggridge, Service Canada panelist

Involving Women in Policy Development

Women, Work and Care provides the basis for growing a policy community that includes the people affected by the issues, particularly diverse young women whose futures are shaped by the policies that affect their life choices.

Clearly, the issues brought forward are of intense interest to women of all ages and backgrounds, and these issues need more attention. One of the many benefits of the Women, Work and Care forum is that it gave the women who attended a deeper appreciation of the consequences of policy on their life choices and opportunities.

Government has identified stronger communities and families as a priority. The Advisory Council on the Status of Women and its partners are proud to contribute the voices of women of all ages and backgrounds to the development of policies that are responsive to the varied circumstances in which families find themselves today.

Special thanks to:

- *Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health*
- *Canadian Labour Congress - Atlantic Region*
- *Canadian Union of Public Employees*
- *Nova Scotia Department of Community Services*
- *Nova Scotia Federation of Labour*
- *Nova Scotia Government Employees' Union*
- *Nova Scotia Public Service Commission*
- *Public Health Agency of Canada*
- *Public Service Alliance of Canada - Atlantic Region*
- *Saint Mary's University (Dept of Political Science, Women's Studies and the Women's Centre)*
- *The United Way of Halifax Region*

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Appendix A

Members of the Roundtable on Women's Economic Security

Nova Scotia Advisory Council Status of Women – Chair
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
Canadian Council on Social Development
Canadian Labour Congress – Atlantic Region
Chamber of Commerce
Citizen at large – Tracy Sullivan, young mother
Department of Community Services
Department of Education
Department of Environment and Labour
Department of Health
Feminists for Just and Equitable Public Policy (FemJEPP)
Halifax Regional School Board
Healthy Balance Research Program
Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association
Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers
Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunity
Office of African Nova Scotia Affairs
Office of Aboriginal Affairs
Office of Economic Development
Partners in Practice
Public Health Agency of Canada
Senior's Secretariat
Service Canada
Status of Women Canada
Transition House Association of Nova Scotia
Women's Centre CONNECT!
Women's Employment Outreach
Women for Economic Equality Society
YWCA

Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women

Conseil consultatif sur la
condition féminine de la
Nouvelle-Écosse